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ABSTRACT

Systematic planning offers a rational approach to solving the problems of providing education. Four fundamental principles are basic to an understanding of the concept of systematic planning. First, it should relate to all aspects of educational decision-making at all levels. Second, it is a multiphased operation involving establishment of goals, assessment of needs, development of objectives, generation of alternative strategies, selection of strategies, formulation of program implementation plans, securing and allocation of resources, and the operation and evaluation of the program. Third, it is best depicted as a cyclic process--once entered into, it provides a permanent, workable mechanism for meeting problems as they develop. Finally, reliable, up-to-date information is central to the process. (Author/PGD)

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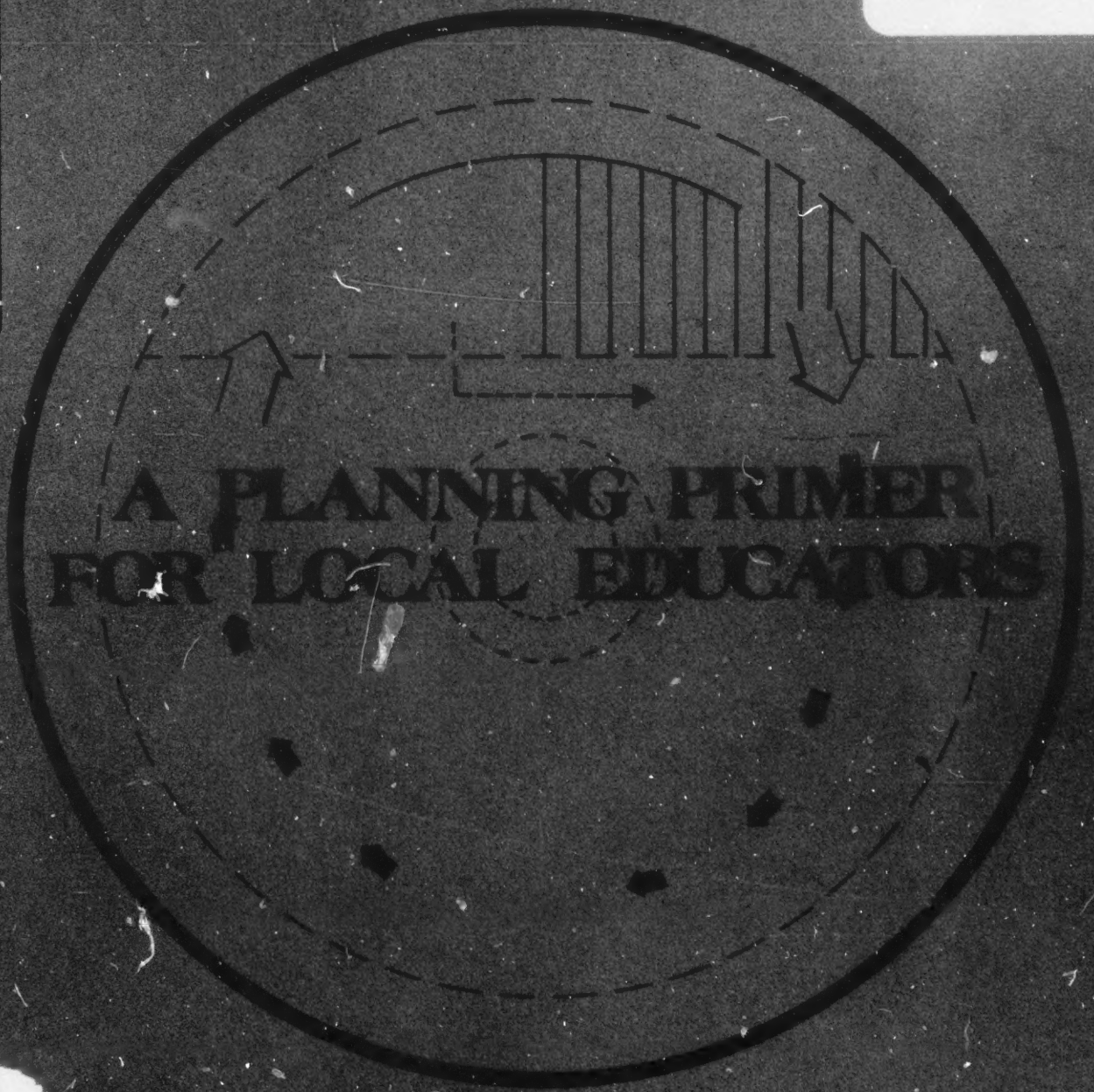

# A PLANNING PRIMER FOR LOCAL EDUCATORS

THE OFFICE OF PLANNING AND EVALUATION
ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA
FEBRUARY, 1977

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# A PLANNING PRIMER FOR LOCAL EDUCATORS

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Montgomery, Alabama
February, 1977



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## PREFACE

During the past three years, staff members in the Office of Planning and Evaluation have made an effort to respond to a variety of requests and expressed concerns of educators throughout the state in the broad area of systematic planning. Two publications, *Educational Planning in Alabama: A Conceptual Framework* (1974), and *Program Evaluation/Validation: A Manual for School Programs* (1975), which evolved from these activities, were specific attempts to provide assistance to LEA's. In addition to producing and disseminating these manuals, nine three-day seminars in systematic planning and six two-day workshops focusing upon program evaluation were conducted for LEA personnel at various levels of responsibility. Upon request, numerous individualized workshops ranging from a few hours duration to as long as three days were also designed and conducted to meet the particular needs of several local school systems.

Now, after three years of active involvement, extensive study, review of the literature, input and reaction from many people, participation in planning and evaluation conferences, interaction with hundreds of Alabama educators, and experience in developing, presenting, and using the proposed planning process, we have prepared this primer as an introduction to the world of systematic planning. It represents our best collective efforts in thinking, writing, synthesizing, explaining, summarizing, and promoting systematic planning as a practical, logical, and orderly procedure for problem solving and responsible, judicious decision making which can lead to improved educational programs.

Hopefully, those who read this overview will be convinced of the merits of systematic planning and will become interested and motivated enough to pursue this highly effective approach to a greater extent with gratifying results.

The monographs listed below provide more in-depth treatment of the various planning cycle components and are available upon request from the Office of Planning and Evaluation.

One - Establishing Goals
Two - Assessing and Analyzing Needs
Three - Identifying Resources and Constraints and Prioritizing Needs
Four - Developing Objectives
Five - Generating and Analyzing Alternative Strategies and Selecting Strategies
Six - Securing and Allocating Resources and Formulating the Program Implementation Plan
Seven - Operating and Evaluating Programs

# A Case for Systematic Planning

Stated in simplest terms, planning is a means for determining: where you are; where you want to go; how you expect to get there; how much it will cost; whether or not you arrive at your destination.

Systematic planning facilitates the application of knowledge, information, and intelligence to the resolution of problems. Essentially, it is a method for ascertaining appropriate future action.

Systematic planning should not be misconstrued as a short cut to effective management. Neither should it be perceived as an "easy," or magical, or effortless problem-solving process. Requisite to any enduring planning approach is a firm commitment. Furthermore, productive application of systematic planning techniques requires diligent effort, adequate resources (both human and material), and lots of common sense.

Educators at all levels of responsibility are involved in various aspects of planning in some form and to some extent. Unfortunately, much of the "planning" that occurs is **incidental** or **accidental** or **crisis-generated** or **spasmodic** or **haphazard** or **disjointed** or **unstructured** or **highly informal**--anything but systematic. In other words, because of dogged insistence and unwavering, but unwarranted, reliance upon intuition, past experience, trial and error, and countless other inadequate means, well-intentioned people routinely deny themselves, their colleagues, and those whom they serve the benefits of the best possible thinking, planning, and information for decision making.

Most educators will readily agree that some systematic approach is essential if the myriad problems, issues, and questions which they face daily are to be handled with any reasonable degree of success. Few would question the advisability of applying basic planning principles in bringing about needed changes and improvements. Hardly any concerned educator would intentionally disregard the important planning concepts outlined on succeeding pages in attempting to make intelligent decisions. Despite these and numerous other clear indications that nearly everyone in education is "for" good planning, it is evident that too many educators are either unwilling or unable to use a systematic, clearly defined planning process in tackling major problems. Somehow, people must be convinced that it is time to translate intellectual agreement with the concept of systematic planning into commitment, involvement, and action. We must not be guilty of imposing the past upon the future simply because we refuse to learn or fail to employ fundamental planning procedures in attacking problems and precipitating desirable change.

Admittedly, it is easier, safer, and less time consuming to function on the basis of tradition and intuition than to purposefully plan for the future. Loud protestations and vehement denials by its proponents to the contrary, this seat-of-the-pants approach is usually much less effective and considerably more costly in the long run. Obviously, this *modus operandi* is less demanding, requires little self-discipline, and hardly any imagination, initiative, or creativeness.

As inconceivable and inexcusable as they are, administrative practices such as playing hunches, responding impulsively, and operating capriciously are not dead. Unfortunately, there are still people in positions of responsibility and authority who are satisfied to remain "caretakers" rather than assume their rightful roles as educational leaders.

Education is much too important to be left to chance. Furthermore, children and youth are far too valuable to have their future determined exclusively by intuitive judgment that fails to provide them with the best possible educational program. Surely the students for whom we are responsible and accountable are entitled to more than mere luck has to offer. Yet, anyone who takes the time to observe only a few randomly selected schools or school systems will be dismayed--even shocked--to note how seldom sound planning principles are brought to bear in addressing significant educational problems.

Clearly, a person attempting to manage any organization without the benefit of well-founded planning principles must rely upon his own devices, techniques, and implicit theories, however inadequate and ineffective, and often uncompromisingly bases his decisions and actions upon "years of experience" to arrive at self-satisfying "practical" solutions to problems. Any advocate of responsible planning would be compelled to view this as a "cop out" of the most serious magnitude. Unquestionably, such a reprehensible approach adversely affects every student and employee under the influence of this "experienced," but uninspired, self-styled perpetrator of educational malpractice. In effect, it constitutes felonious assault on the lives of children and results in irreparable harm. Additionally, this type approach makes a mockery of the lip-service support espoused by "practitioners" who have mastered the art of dodging issues, jumping to conclusions, putting out brush fires, pointing fingers of blame, encouraging the status quo, looking for excuses, rewarding incompetency, destroying initiative, encouraging mediocrity, thinking small, talking a good game, *ad infinitem.*

Although history, experience, and common sense tell us that we cannot protect everyone from making bad choices (poor decisions), systematic planning can greatly enhance the likelihood that decision makers at all levels will make fewer of these bad choices. Systematic planning will not prepare one for every eventuality, but it can provide a solid, workable framework for a rational approach to problem solving. Moreover, adoption of an appropriate systematic planning process can lead to more effective instruction and support services which should ultimately culminate in improved student learning. And, after all, this is what the business of education is all about.

Systematic planning is a process which enables one to identify, implement, and manage needed changes more effectively. It encourages--in fact, forces--thoughtful consideration of viable alternatives as educators continue efforts to find better ways to fulfill their obligations and meet ever-rising expectations.

Traditionally, as alluded to earlier, planning has been reactionary in nature, occuring mainly as a desperation attempt to cope with "problems" related to either buildings and other facilities, enrollment, the education budget, or parental complaints/criticisms. Too much attention has been focused upon money, buildings, politics, and appeasement of groups and/or individuals and not enough upon what happens to the students inside the buildings or how effectively resources are used to provide the kind of education students need and deserve.

As the emphasis in education shifts more and more from prior well-meaning but misdirected interest in quantity to a concern for quality, it becomes increasingly important to plan for needed change. It is by no means inconceivable that the entire educational process may be headed for a major overhaul and revamping. One of several encouraging signs that this may happen is the significant departure (at least conceptually and hopefully in practice) from the outmoded concept of education which goes something like this: "Teaching consists of one who 'knows' telling those who don't know, then commending the few who remember the most of what was said." By contrast, current thinking is epitomized in the statement: "The role of the teacher has changed from a dispenser of facts to a facilitator of learning." Most educators concur that "telling isn't teaching," but the step from conceptual acceptance of this idea to implementation is a large one requiring planning commitment and competencies which many schools and school systems do not presently possess. It is apparent that if this desirable goal is to be achieved, it must receive priority consideration which results in establishment of a systematic planning capability. The above considerations are cogent reminders that it is no longer enough merely to provide more of everything. We must also search continually for ways to make things better. A concerted effort must be made to deliver educational programs that more nearly approach our aspirations and the needs and interests of students.

Attempts to effect planned change will falter or fail unless sound principles of management are utilized. The management process, which requires that resources be applied in such a manner as to optimize results, gets things done through people and involves both planning and controlling functions. In fulfilling their role as managers of the educational enterprise, educators, just as managers of any business endeavor, are responsible for: (1) identifying the mission of the organization; (2) enumerating the tasks which must be performed to accomplish the mission; and (3) assuring that the tasks are completed. The proposed planning process very definitely includes provisions for effectively meeting these requirements. The planning cycle suggested in this publication is in effect a system approach to problem solving and, as such, represents a logical, structured, practical process which, if followed, offers reasonable assurance of increased effectiveness and significant improvement in the quality of the educational process as well as the product. This approach is applicable in almost any situation, large or small, and is appropriate for use by teachers, principals, central office staff, superintendents, and school board members. The basic components comprising the

planning cycle have value both individually and as an integrated system. As the planning cycle concept is developed and explained in more detail, it will become quite evident that the nature of the problem to be resolved will determine to a great extent how the various components are utilized. There will be times and circumstances which will require or involve the use of only one or perhaps a combination of two or more of the components. Likewise, it will be readily apparent under other conditions that the complete planning cycle can be employed to advantage.

The planning cycle should derive its value not because it is an interesting theory or because it serves as a basis for intellectual discussion and debate, but rather because it has made a legitimate contribution as a catalyst for action--action which results in improved decision making and better education.

Regardless of the approach employed in planning efforts, we must ultimately evaluate ourselves and the effectiveness of our planning by answering such critical questions as: What has happened as a consequence of planning that has contributed to education? How has the school or school system (including personnel) been changed for the better? What difference has systematic planning really made for students?

At this point, someone may raise the perfectly legitimate question: **If systematic planning is so great, why aren't more educators using it?** Doubtless, there are others, but the following commonly expressed or inferred attitudes are sufficient to illustrate the diversity of reasons why planning is not utilized to greater advantage:

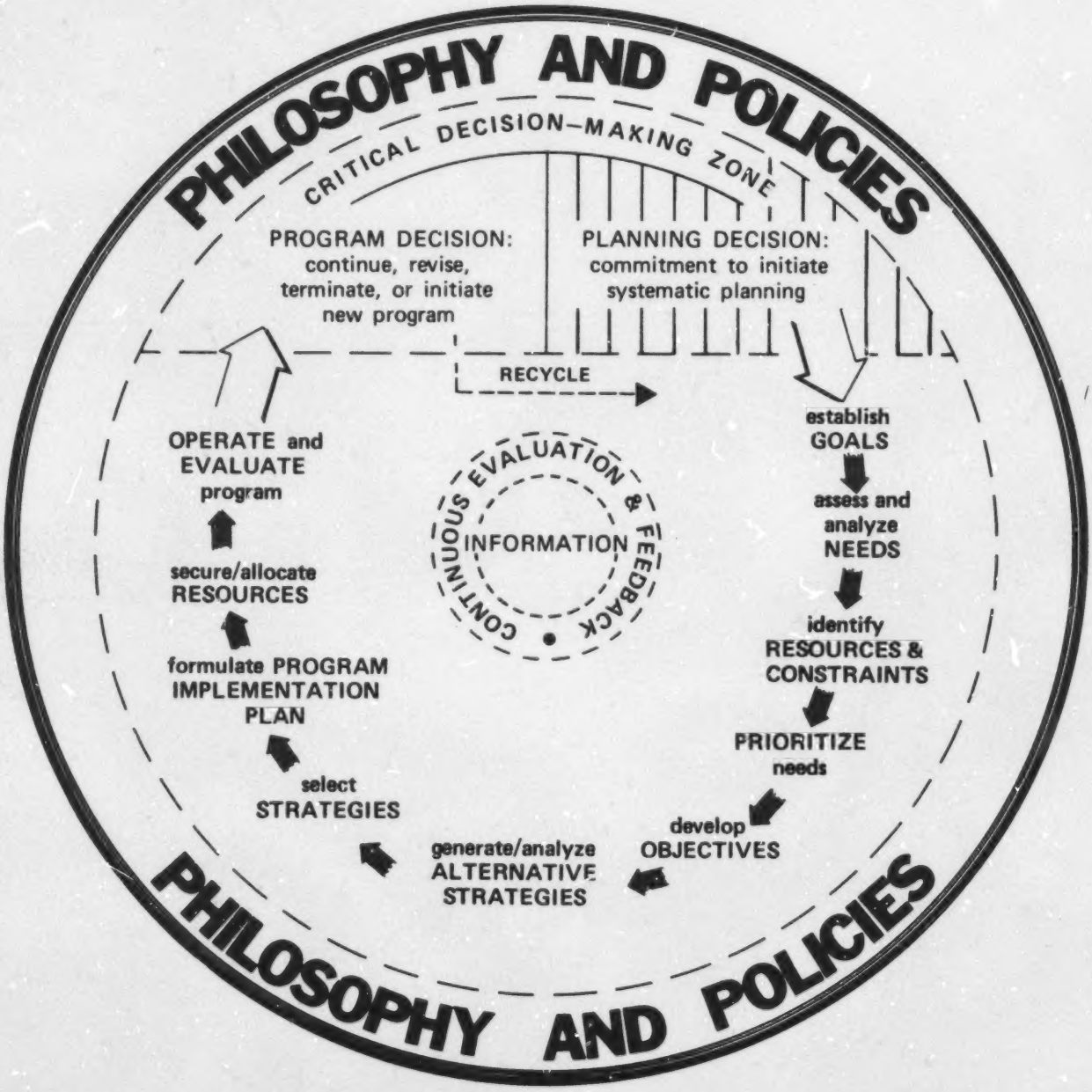
- Don't know how (unable)
- Don't want to know how (not convinced it has merit)
- Don't care (unwilling)
- Human tendency to feel threatened by change (afraid to take risks)
- Impression that it is too theoretical (impractical)
- Too involved in daily operating routines to see long-range benefits (myopia)
- Resistance to and fear of something new or different that is not developed internally ("not invented here" syndrome)
- Satisfied with the status quo (limited in vision and imagination)

Another important question requiring a response is: **What are the people who aren't using systematic planning missing?** Below is a listing and/or paraphrasing of a variety of claims (taken from numerous sources) relative to the value and advantage of following a systematic planning process.

- Provides for greater involvement in planning and increased participation in decision-making
- Creates a climate of educational improvement

- Is sensitive and responsive to the people affected by decisions
- Leads to vastly improved accountability measures
- Translates expectations and/or aspirations into action
- Increases probability that often neglected facets of the educational enterprise will receive fair consideration and attention
- Improves management skills and increases administrative effectiveness
- Eliminates much inefficiency and many poor decisions
- Promotes better utilization of resources resulting in achievement of maximum benefits
- Heightens commitment (logical and emotional conviction) to quality education
- Improves educational programs
- Significantly improves quality of the educational product
- Protects against undesirable change
- Assists in development of preventive strategies, thus avoiding brush-fire tactics
- Tends to keep people from remaining unaffected by significant data
- Forces specification of objectives and development of strategies for achieving them
- Encourages consideration of viable alternatives
- Provides effective means for monitoring ongoing activities
- Requires a logical, orderly procedure for identifying and resolving problems based on needs
- Provides self-correcting mechanism (feedback and revision)
- Provides for collection, analysis, and use of valid data for decision making
- Demands adequate evaluation procedures

The planning cycle proposed and explained in the pages which follow suggests a systematic approach to problem solving. When adapted for a particular situation and faithfully followed, it can produce many of the benefits claimed above.




# A PLANNING CYCLE

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ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 1976

# A Planning Cycle

The planning cycle presented on the opposite page is one representation of the planning process. Because systematic planning is action-oriented, it cannot be completely or definitively captured in such a diagram. This planning cycle does, however, incorporate a number of important principles which should be considered by school personnel seeking to develop a framework for planning in their local systems. The four principles which are presented and explained in this section constitute the very foundation of the planning process. They are fundamental to an understanding of the proposed concept of systematic planning and should be critically examined by those seriously interested in pursuing this approach.

- Systematic planning should be related to all aspects of decision making within a school system.
- Systematic planning is a multi-phased approach to problem solving and improved decision making.
- Systematic planning is best depicted as a cyclic process.
- Information is central to the systematic planning process.

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**Systematic planning should be related to all aspects of educational decision making within a school system.**

A school system's philosophy and the local school board's written policies establish the boundaries within which any systematic planning effort is conducted. Existing philosophy and policies can potentially influence and affect activities undertaken during each of the designated phases of the planning process. The broken line separating **Philosophy and Policies** from the other components of the planning cycle signifies the continuous interchange between these.

**The Critical Decision-Making Zone** (positioned in the upper portion of the planning cycle) illustrates the important relationship between systematic planning and ongoing decision-making activities within a school system. As previously stated, systematic planning can improve the quality of decisions made by educators. The left half of the zone represents **Program Decisions**. Educators at all levels within a school system are continually involved in determinations as to whether individual programs should be continued "as are," revised or modified, or terminated. Such decisions

should be based upon information, more specifically, upon evaluative information. The planning cycle suggests that information generated by systematic planning should be used in making program decisions.

The right half of the Critical Decision-Making Zone represents the **Planning Decision.** School systems do not use systematic planning by chance; rather, people in leadership positions purposefully decide to commit themselves and, in turn, their organizations to this approach to problem solving. The planning decision must be made and people at all levels within the school system must be informed of this decision, or preferably involved in the making of this decision, before systematic planning can be seriously undertaken. What type of commitment should be made by key individuals and groups within a school system? The following suggestions are not all-inclusive, but should serve as guidelines for action at the local level.

- **Local Superintendent of Education** -- The commitment of the top leadership is the key to the success of systematic planning in any organization or agency. In a local school system, the system superintendent must be convinced that the benefits to be realized from systematic planning will justify the time, effort, and expense associated with the effort. The superintendent who is personally convinced that the use of systematic planning can "make a difference" in his local system will want to pursue some preplanning activities prior to "springing" this approach on his school board and staff.* The superintendent who is serious about putting planning to work for his system should consider completing the following activities before formally recommending this approach to the board of education or arbitrarily imposing it upon system personnel:

  1. **Identify and enlist the support of a number of key personnel.** The superintendent will need assistance in completing the preplanning activities identified below, i.e. in identifying a planning process appropriate to the system's unique characteristics, in delineating the nature and scope of the system's initial planning efforts, in projecting resource requirements, and in promoting or "selling" the planning process within the system. The superintendent will know which of his staff members can be of greatest assistance in accomplishing these ends. There are no absolute criteria for selecting this nucleus of support; however, individuals who are open-minded, creative, and enthusiastic should be prime candidates. The superintendent may also wish to include any key administrator (be he a central office staff

*These suggested preplanning activities should be considered by any individual seeking to inaugurate a systematic planning effort. That is to say, a building principal committed to initiating a planning process in his school should undertake these same kinds of preplanning activities. This discussion is related to the system superintendent because, ideally, the commitment to planning should begin at this level.

member or a building principal) who has traditional and rather rigid views and who might be expected to oppose or even sabotage any departure from time-honored procedures. Oftentimes, one is well-advised to convert possible opposition before it matures. Having identified a planning team, the superintendent's first tasks will be to educate its members relative to the principles and procedures of systematic planning and to persuade them that the pay-off to be derived from the use of planning makes it imperative that the system incorporate this approach into its decision-making activities.

2. **Consider and adopt a tentative approach to planning ("a plan" for planning) that is appropriate to the unique problems, needs, personnel, resources, etc. of the local school setting.** The planning cycle presented in this publication may serve as a springboard for thought and action in this area. As previously suggested, however, there is no one infallible formula or recipe for systematic planning. The ingredients may vary according to the individuals responsible for blending or mixing them together into a workable approach. Once an individual has acquired a clear understanding of the basic purposes and principles associated with each phase of the planning process, he is well-justified in altering or modifying a "packaged" approach in any manner to make it more acceptable and useful to him and others who will employ it. The important point here is that advocates of systematic planning in a local setting should agree in advance concerning what they are advocating.

3. **Delineate nature and scope of system's initial planning efforts.** Some people have the idea that systematic planning is synonymous with comprehensive systematic planning; that the focus of a planning effort has to be the entire educational program of a district; that the planning effort must begin with a complex goal-setting and needs assessment project which is likely to consume several years and to terminate with the publication of information that may be obsolete at the time of publication. These are erroneous assumptions, false impressions that have "turned off" many conscientious, sincere people who might have reaped real benefits from the application of planning to critical problems and needs. The scope of a planning effort should be defined by reference to the real and pressing problems and needs which exist in a system. Do not implement systematic planning as an end in itself; planning just for the sake of planning is usually a waste of time, an exercise in futility. The surest way to taint the process and to mobilize opposition is to force people to plan as an intellectual exercise. Systematic planning should be introduced as a way to resolve a real problem. This is not to suggest that comprehensive planning efforts are not valuable. On the contrary, comprehensive planning which focuses upon the complete range and scope of

a school system's educational program should be conducted periodically in order to assure that system-wide goals are clearly articulated and understood by all interested parties; that needs are related to these goals and that these needs are assigned priorities so that resource allocations are, in turn, related to these real needs; that the various programs within the system are compatible and mutually supportive; etc. Such a comprehensive planning effort is an ambitious undertaking and may extend over a two or three-year time period. While a school system initiating systematic planning may need to undertake such an effort, the system leadership may determine that the planning process should first be applied to a program, problem, or need which can be more narrowly defined. One of the advantages of limiting the scope of initial planning efforts is obvious. Participants are likely to realize more immediate pay-off from their efforts if planning is related to a pressing and tangible problem or need to which they can easily relate. If school system employees experience success in their early planning effort(s), they are more likely to become (or remain) enthusiastic concerning the benefits of systematic planning. Only the local superintendent and his planning team can determine the appropriate focus for early planning efforts. This determination should be carefully weighed prior to inaugurating the planning process in a school system.

4. **Project resource requirements.** What kinds of resources are essential to the operation of a systematic planning effort? Obviously, the nature and scope of the particular planning endeavor will suggest the type and quantity of resources needed; these will vary from project to project and from school system to school system. The following listing includes resources usually associated with educational planning efforts:

    a. **Personnel.** People -- their time, energy, imagination, and commitment -- are the single most important ingredients in successful planning endeavors. As will be emphasized throughout this discussion, systematic planning depends upon the involvement of people at all levels within a school system and within the community which it serves. The time which school system employees--the superintendent and central office staff, principals, teachers, etc.--devote to planning efforts must be budgeted. Unless planning is an announced priority within a system, faculty and staff may relegate planning activities to an unimportant position.

        In addition to the time which must be budgeted for participants in the planning process, someone must be assigned responsibility for directing and monitoring the system's planning endeavors. Larger systems may choose to establish a planning unit staffed by a

full-time educational planner. The size and organizational complexity of the system may necessitate a full-time staff to provide overall coordination and direction for systematic planning efforts. On the other hand, smaller systems likely will neither require nor have the resources to employ a full-time planning staff. The superintendent or a member of his staff will need to provide ongoing leadership and direction for systematic planning efforts.

b. **Supplies and Expenses.** Even a small-scale and relatively modest planning effort will require some financial support for miscellaneous expenses associated with its operation. Office supplies, duplicating and/or printing, postage etc., are among expense items commonly associated with planning efforts.

c. **Consultants.** A school system embarking on a planning endeavor may desire to employ outside consultants in one of more phases of its planning efforts. The need for such consultative assistance will be influenced by the size and expertise of the system's planning staff. The system's leadership may wish to use outside consultants to assist in preplanning activities. If the system has no previous experience with systematic planning, faculty, staff, board members, community leaders, etc., will need an orientation to the principles of systematic planning as well as training in specific skills supportive of the planning process. Consultants can plan and conduct such training sessions. A local school system may wish to engage a consultant in this area from a university or from another local school system that has been involved in systematic planning efforts. The Planning and Evaluation Section, Alabama State Department of Education, provides these kinds of training workshops as a service to local school systems in defining the nature and scope of planning efforts. The planning process presented in this publication is flexible and adaptable: this process may be used in the conduct of comprehensive educational planning which focuses upon all of a system's programs and activities; it may also be used for more limited planning efforts that are geared to particular programs or areas of concern within a school district. Consultants can advise systems as to the appropriate scope of initial planning efforts.

A local school system may choose to use the services of a consultant throughout a given planning effort or it may determine that a consultant's services are needed only during certain phases of the planning endeavor, e.g. in goal-setting, developing of objectives and evaluation design, program evaluation, etc.

The superintendent and his preplanning team need to consider the above and other related resource requirements prior to arriving at any firm decision concerning the time and occasion for implementing systematic planning. An ill-timed, poorly conceived attempt to install planning can easily be aborted by a shortage of supporting resources. Such a false start can leave people with negative impressions and strong biases which can be expected to restrain future planning attempts.

5. **Create the climate conducive to implementation of a systematic planning process.** The system superintendent and members of his preplanning team must be prepared to "sell" the idea of systematic planning to other key individuals and groups in the school community, including the local board of education, central office supervisors and coordinators, building principals, teachers, and other staff members. The proper climate for installation of a systematic planning process can, of course, be related to the attitudes of these potential participants toward this process. The nature of the commitment desired from each of these groups is discussed below; this kind of commitment is the desired outcome of the orientation program which should be planned by the system leadership as a part of this activity. The orientation program should be designed to educate participants relative to the basic principles, procedures, and uses of systematic planning.

◆ **Local Board of Education** -- In most instances, the local superintendent would recommend to the board that the system adopt systematic planning as the basis for problem-solving and decision making. Although subsequent planning efforts will, in most cases, be directed by the superintendent and his staff, the superintendent should recognize the importance of apprising his board of this approach and of securing their endorsement and support for same. Three important reasons for securing the board's support are as follow:

1. School board members need to understand the systematic planning process if they are expected to base their decisions upon information generated from planning efforts. If the superintendent is truly committed to systematic planning, he will support many of his recommendations to the board with information derived from systematic planning.*

*Admittedly, the superintendent who recommends systematic planning to his board must be courageous! A superintendent who has only a weak or lukewarm commitment to this approach surely would not undertake this action, for he would not want to be bound to supporting his own recommendations to the board with data and information resulting from systematic planning efforts.

2. The school board, collectively and as individual members, would be involved in systematic planning in numerous ways, e.g. budget planning, resource utilization, organizational structure, use of facilities, and instructional improvement. Thus, each board member would need to gain a participant's understanding of the process and would have to be willing to commit his time and effort to various planning endeavors.
3. The school board will, upon the recommendation of the superintendent, need to insure successful implementation of systematic planning. Ideally, the local school board's support for systematic planning should be expressed in a written policy statement. The superintendent should assume responsibility for drafting a recommended policy for consideration by the board. The substantive content of the policy should reflect management's philosophy concerning the use of systematic planning by system personnel and should assign responsibility to the superintendent for assuring compliance with the policy.

◆ **Central Office Supervisors and Building Principals** -- The superintendent should apprise these key administrators of his commitment to the systematic planning process as early in the preplanning stage as feasible. The local superintendent can best judge exactly when to involve these administrators--whether their involvement should come prior to or after the presentation to the school board. Obviously, the timing of the superintendent's initial approach to these individuals will be affected by such factors as the size, cohesiveness, background, and training of members of the administrative team along with other unique local considerations. This group should be involved, however, in the making of decisions relative to implementation of the planning process. Their support of and enthusiasm for the effort is essential to its success, for they are members of management and will have to assume varying degrees of responsibility for planning, leading, monitoring, and reviewing subsequent planning efforts. The superintendent should provide for early orientation and training sessions designed to meet the particular needs of these administrators.

◆ **Faculty and Other Staff Members** -- Teachers and other staff members should also be involved in the making of planning decisions during the preplanning phases. Central office coordinators and building principals should assume leadership positions in providing appropriate orientation and training experiences for their staff members; however, these efforts should be coordinated system wide. The nature and depth of these training sessions will depend upon the system's philosophy concerning the use of systematic planning. If teachers and staff members are expected

to serve as participants in planning efforts which are directed by the administration, they will need only a participant's orientation to the process. On the other hand, the school system leadership may view the planning process as a tool or technique which can be put to work at all levels and for a multitude of purposes in the system. This point of view might envision systematic planning as an effective tool for classroom management, lunchroom management, etc. In this case, teachers and other staff members might be expected to apply the planning process to their own programs and activities. These individuals would, in this event, need more detailed and in-depth training in the application of systematic planning. Again, it is important to generate understanding and enthusiastic support for the process among all system staff members.

**Systematic planning is a multi-phased approach to problem solving and improved decision making.**

The planning cycle depicts ten individual phases of activity associated with the planning process--beginning with **Establishing Goals** and moving clockwise to **Operating and Evaluating Program.** Each of these ten phases is devoted to the completion of a major activity. The introduction of these components which follows is intended to focus upon the relationships between and among the individual phases and to convey to the reader a general understanding of the complete cycle.

**Establish Goals** -- The initial phase in the cycle includes all of the activities designed to produce statements incorporating the general intents or purposes and/or the expected outcomes of the program which is under development or review. These statements, most often referred to as educational goals, express the ideals of a school system or of an individual program thereof, the ends toward which efforts are directed. Goals are (or should be) the point of reference for each of the subsequent phases in the planning cycle--needs, objectives, strategies, resource allocations should relate logically to one or more goal statements.

**Assess and Analyze Needs** -- Goal statements are made in terms of ideal or desired conditions. In order to make progress toward goal attainment, it is necessary to identify the conditions that exist and compare these with the ideal conditions reflected in the goal statements. The discrepancy between existing and desired conditions are termed needs. Basically, needs are the difference between what actually exists and what should exist. They are the identified deficit. Once needs are identified, it is important to make a careful analysis of each need in order to gain a better understanding of what is causing the discrepancy between actual and desired

conditions. One outcome of this phase of activity should be statements of need which are related to the goal statements emerging from the first activity phase in the planning cycle. Furthermore, the analysis of each need statement should result in a compilation of conditions and factors contributing to the need as well as an indication of the degree or extent of the need (as compared to the goal statement). The products of this phase of the planning process are directly related to the next two stages--the identification of resources and constraints, and the prioritization of needs.

**Identify Resources and Constraints** -- Resources include anything needed to get a job done--people, money, materials, equipment, time, etc. Constraints encompass anything that might impede or interfere with progress toward job completion--resource limitations, political realities, laws and/or policies, etc. The basic purpose of this activity phase is then to estimate the resources that would be required to alleviate or eliminate identified needs (and thereby achieve stated goals) and to isolate any constraints or potential barriers to this accomplishment. Other related questions should be addressed during this phase in the cycle: What resources are currently available, and how are they being utilized? How might existing resources be reallocated or used more effectively? What are the prospects of acquiring additional resources, and what are possible sources? Likewise, the systematic planner will go beyond a simple enumeration of constraints and will seek answers to the following kinds of questions: Is the identified constraint real or assumed? Permanent or temporary? Will the identified constraint insure failure in goal attainment, or can program planners work around this obstacle? etc. Much of the information generated during this phase will be preliminary and tentative; some will represent hypothetical thinking. Final determinations concerning resources and constraints are obviously contingent upon decisions that will be made in subsequent phases of the cycle. This fact does not diminish the importance of exploring the above questions at this juncture. Failure to devote proper attention to these considerations early in the planning cycle can doom the entire process.

**Prioritize Needs** -- The number and range of needs revealed by the needs assessment and analysis will in most instances dictate that some difficult choices be made concerning which deficiencies are most critical and in greatest need of remediation. Previous projections of resource requirements will likely suggest that the cost of meeting all identified needs concurrently would be prohibitive. Other constraining factors may attach a high risk to a frontal attack on certain identified needs. Thus, the decision makers will have to judge which of the needs should be assigned precedence or preference in order, rank, or position. The products of this activity phase will be (1) a listing of identified needs in order of their priority, and (2) a determination of how many of these needs can be met given the identified limitations and constraints. Subsequent phases of program planning will focus upon the priority needs designated during this activity phase. Those needs assigned a lower

priority will become a part of the information center and may be retrieved for consideration at some future date when resources and other constraining factors permit.

**Develop Objectives** -- Completion of the initial phases in the planning cycle should enable detailed specification of the intent of the program under design. This is accomplished through the development of well-stated objectives. Like the goal to which it is related, an objective describes the desired conditions to be attained. The objective, however, is much more specific than the goal and, unlike the goal, is stated in measurable terms which usually include the conditions under which activities will occur, the target date for achievement, and the exact level of attainment expected. Objectives should also provide a means for determining if the desired results have been achieved; that is, objectives should include an indication of the evaluation measure(s) to be employed for this purpose. The relationships between the development of objectives and program evaluation are of critical importance and warrant serious attention. Successful completion of the remaining phases in the planning cycle will be highly contingent upon the development of well-stated objectives during this phase. For this reason, it is imperative that the reader understand the crucial nature of the objective development component.

**Generate/Analyze Alternative Strategies** -- Strategies delineate what needs to be done to accomplish a particular objective and who is to be responsible for assuring that the specified work is completed on schedule. A strategy, sometimes referred to as a procedure, is a careful plan or method and is usually composed of a number of activities and tasks.

Generating and analyzing alternative strategies is an important, but too often neglected, phase of the planning process. People tend to overlook the fact that there is almost always more than one way of accomplishing any given objective and that the pros and cons of each method must be carefully weighed to determine which has the best chance of succeeding in a unique local situation given the identified resources and constraints (economic, social, political, personnel, etc.). Either we don't want to take the time to explore possible avenues that may never be taken; or we have a preconceived notion of what we want to do and how we plan to proceed; or we're anxious to jump on the bandwagon and implement a program that has worked somewhere else .... Reluctance to devote time and talent to identifying various ways of accomplishing objectives and/or failure to use the information generated in preceding phases in the analysis of alternative methods can negate all benefits associated with systematic planning. On the other hand, thorough and careful consideration of alternate ways of proceeding at this point will greatly enhance the possibilities that the program ultimately implemented will achieve its objectives.

**Select Strategies** -- The selection of a strategy or strategies to accomplish a designated objective should be considerably easier if proper time and attention were devoted to the analysis of alternatives in the preceding phase. Those involved in making these decisions will be well-advised to develop a set of objective criteria for use in evaluating the various alternatives. Included among the criteria might be such factors as time; cost; staff training requirements; spin-off effects; feasibility; risk; and pay-off (relationship between cost and projected benefits). Information concerning these factors should have been collected during the preceding phase. While the use of objective criteria is essential to judicious decision making, educators should understand the need for exercising sound professional judgment in making choices during this phase.

**Formulate Program Implementation Plan** -- The purpose of this phase is to produce a blueprint for action; the product of this phase should be a written, detailed plan. The implementation plan focuses upon the strategies that have been selected to achieve specified objectives. The plan details the work to be accomplished, in the form of activities and tasks; indicates who will be responsible for the completion of each activity and task; projects the beginning and ending dates for each unit of work, along with cost estimates for each; and includes provisions for evaluation. Such a written plan is required to insure that the decisions made through systematic planning are implemented effectively and that the resultant program operates as designed. This phase is a crucial link in the planning process; a link between planning and action. As such, it can be viewed as the culmination of previous planning phases and as the commencement of the fully developed program.

**Secure/Allocate Resources** -- Following formulation of the program implementation plan, the necessary resources must be secured and allocated. Resource requirements should not take anyone by surprise at this stage in the systematic planning process, for attention should have focused upon these both before prioritizing needs and prior to selecting strategies. Those in leadership and decision-making positions should already have made a commitment to provide resources necessary for program implementation. This phase suggests the need to allocate resources in time to assure that program implementation proceeds on schedule.

**Operate and Evaluate Program** -- At this point, all of the components of the program--the objectives, strategies, program implementation plan, and evaluation design--should be clearly defined and the resources needed to activate the program should be allocated. While "the best laid plans of mice and men" can still go astray, this is the point at which previous planning efforts should pay dividends. Those responsible for conducting the program should have confidence in their knowledge of "where they are" (point of departure), "where they are going" (destination), "how

they expect to arrive," and "at what cost." Furthermore, they can anticipate the gratification to be derived from systematic feedback relative to whether they are "on course" and when "they arrive." This knowledge is one tangible benefit to be realized from planning efforts All of this is not to suggest that the work associated with operating and evaluating the program will be easy; it is to say that the work, when preceded by systematic planning, will be purposeful.

Throughout the program operation, someone must be assigned responsibility for overall coordination and control of program activities. These are management functions and are supported by the companion functions, monitoring and reviewing. All four of these functions will ultimately relate to another all-important managerial responsibility and a major component of the planning cycle, evaluation.

Stated simply, evaluation is a process for determining if a program is achieving its stated objectives. Thus, a primary responsibility of those involved in evaluation is to obtain and provide useful information and to combine measurement and judgment in the making of decisions relative to program effectiveness. Although this component is positioned near the end of the planning cycle, evaluation should not be conceived as a process that occurs only at the end of an activity or program. Evaluation activities should be conducted throughout the planning and operation of a program. The **Continuous Evaluation and Feedback** component, positioned in the center of the diagram, is intended to convey the importance of ongoing evaluation throughout program planning and operation. An efficient feedback system which provides accurate, updated, significant data is an essential part of the evaluation process. Neither should evaluation be conducted as an afterthought and only because someone external to the program requires an evaluation report. Effective, meaningful evaluation is a product of advance planning and is dependent upon a detailed and comprehensive design which should have been developed long before the program was implemented. As previously indicated, program evaluation should evolve logically and naturally from program objectives. Well-stated program objectives which have built-in provisions for ultimate evaluation greatly facilitate the evaluation process.*

The information derived from program evaluation is of greatest value and relevance to those accountable for the quality of educational programs provided for the youth of their community. The results of program evaluation do not justify the time devoted to the process if they are used only to write a project report that will be filed and forgotten. Evaluation results may, as indicated in the **Program Decision** component of the cycle, suggest that the program should be continued "as is," revised, or terminated and/or that a new program should be planned and installed. Program

*This theme is explored in detail in another publication developed and disseminated by the Office of Planning and Evaluation, Alabama SDE, which is entitled *Program Evaluation/Validation: A Manual for School Programs.*

evaluation is worthwhile only if its results are used by program managers and a school system's leadership to make decisions which will lead to improved educational programs.

Systematic planning is best depicted as a cyclic process.

As previously explained, no one phase in the planning process should be viewed as an end in and of itself; all of the phases are interrelated, and the outcome(s) of each activity phase serves as input for one or more other phases in the process. This is just as true of the program operation and evaluation phase as of the goal-setting phase. Once systematic planning has been initiated, through the kinds of activities described under the discussion of the **Planning Decision**, the process should be self-renewing. This principle is embodied in the "Planning Cycle" by the **Recycle** arrow emerging from the **Program Decision**. The program decision should, as previously discussed, be based upon information derived from program evaluation. The program decision will, in turn, determine the point of reentry to the planning cycle (the phase with which the recycling will begin). For example, if the decision were made to continue the program "as is," recycling might proceed to the program operation phase--assuming, of course, that the decision to continue the program carried with it a commitment to allocate resources sufficient for this purpose. If the decision made were to revise or modify the program, recycling would likely begin with a review and modification of objectives. On the other hand, a decision to terminate a given program and/or initiate a new program might lead to reexamination of the prioritized needs. A decision to terminate a program may well result from the fact that this program was successful; that it achieved its objectives and attained the related goal; that it, in essence, eliminated the need which it was designed to meet. Under such circumstances, decision makers may choose to attack another identified need which has not previously been addressed because of resource limitations.

All of this is not to suggest that recycling never begins with the goal-setting phase; on the contrary, educators are well-advised to provide for a periodic review of previously identified goals, needs, etc. Those involved in systematic planning should take steps to assure that the information produced in its various phases is continually updated and used for future program planning.

**Information is central to the systematic planning process.**

The successful completion of each phase of the planning process is dependent upon the availability of reliable, updated information. In turn, completion of each identified phase produces additional information. The information emerging from planning activities should be "fed back" to an established information center, coded, and filed for future use. This function is illustrated in the planning cycle by the **Continuous Evaluation and Feedback** component which encircles the **Information** component situated at the core of the planning cycle. These two components should be in continuous operation and, as previously stated, should interact with each of the individual phases in the cycle. The broken lines enclosing these components suggest the continual interchange between these two functions and all other parts of the cycle. These components have been designated as functions because someone must be assigned responsibility for assuring that they are active and operative throughout the planning process. Neither of these components operates automatically; to be viable each must be carefully designed and vigorously supported.

Some educators are apprehensive or uncomfortable when confronted with the necessity of establishing an information system or information center and immediately assume that this component must be highly sophisticated or complex. Such is not the case. The information system need only meet the requirements of the people whom it is to serve. Regardless of the relative complexity or simplicity of the information component, provision should be made for the following: (1) identification of information required during each phase; (2) collection of needed information; (3) storage of the information in an orderly, systematic fashion; (4) easy and quick retrieval of stored information; (5) incorporation of information generated throughout the planning cycle into the system. One individual should be assigned responsibility for coordinating the information function and for assuring that provision is made for each of the above. All of those involved in the systematic planning process should be advised that there is an information coordinator and should direct all requests for information to this individual. Likewise, all information collected during a planning effort should be channeled to this individual for processing and storage.

The **Continuous Evaluation and Feedback** function should also be operative from the outset of a planning endeavor. The director or coordinator of the overall program planning effort should assume responsibility for insuring the effective operation of this component. Information derived from this component will assist in answering the following kinds of questions: Is the planning effort progressing as projected during the preplanning phase? Was each phase completed on schedule, and were the intended outcomes achieved? Are sound planning principles and practices guiding those involved in the effort? Continuous evaluation and feedback are particularly crucial during program implementation and operation.

# Recap and Review

This publication was intended as an introduction to systematic planning and was developed primarily for local school personnel. An attempt was made to relate the **purposes, potential**, and basic **principles** of systematic planning to the problems, needs, and concerns of local school administrators, supervisors, and teachers. Because a primer is designed to convey only the first principles of a subject, this publication may leave the reader with many unanswered questions concerning the application of planning principles. Hopefully, however, this particular primer has motivated its readers to pursue their study and use of systematic planning and has provided them with some direction for so doing. On the other hand, a primer should provide answers to certain fundamental questions pertaining to its subject. The questions listed below have been answered in this primer. The reader who wishes to test his comprehension of the preceding pages can use these questions as a final review.

What is systematic planning?
Why plan?
Who can benefit from the use of planning principles?
What are people who do not use planning missing?
How can "a planning cycle" assist those who wish to use systematic planning?
What basic principles constitute the foundation of the planning process?
What type planning commitment should be made by key people within a school system?
What five preplanning activities should be undertaken by the leader seeking to initiate systematic planning in his organization?
What are the major phases of the planning cycle?
Why is systematic planning depicted as a cyclic process?
Why is information important to the planning process?

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